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Subject: Intensity of Spirit.

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PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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INTENSITY OF SPIRIT.

“Lord, help me.”—Matt. xv., 25.

How lightly that phrase drops from the lips of thousands who, when pressed by a little care, or vexed by some intemperate act, are accustomed, as it were, to fling it toward the sky! How often we invoke the name of God for our most pitiful needs, and how often we avoid it in the profoundest depths of our necessity! They cannot imagine the intensity of this simple petition in this remarkable history, who have never themselves suffered, and been wrung with suffering. For this is a portion of one of the most striking incidents in the life of Jesus.

Only once during his active ministry did he go out of the bounds of Palestine, in so far as we know; and this was the time. He proceeded north from Galilee; and, turning toward his left, went on near to the Mediterranean Sea, in the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon. It is not stated that he entered either of those cities, although it is possible. It is said that he *came into their borders*, which would seem to imply that he only approached that populous district which usually lies around about the vicinity of cities. It seems to have been his desire to preach once, at least, in every portion of Palestine and of its immediate vicinity where his countrymen were to be found, and to make known to them this new spiritual kingdom.

He made three entire circuits, apparently, of the whole of Palestine; and of Galilee some eight or ten circuits. There were many Jews in this vicinity. Already they had become commercial adventurers, and had flocked to large cities and sea-ports. The Jews had gone out into the Greek cities of Asia Minor; they had penetrated perhaps even to Italy and to Rome, and to Damascus; and all the great cities east were full of them. They had gone down to Egypt. They were the Yankees of antiquity in Palestine and Alexandria. So populous had they become, and so rich, that there they had built a new temple—the only duplication of the temple in Jerusalem that I know of. And everywhere their synagogues and their schools were found.

For, chiefest of all nations of antiquity, the Jews believed in education, and everywhere made provision for what to them was equivalent to our common schools; and more nearly like these schools than those in any other nation of olden times, and I might say than in most nations of modern times, was their system of educating the common people.

Our Lord seems to have gone toward Tyre and Sidon, following the track of his countrymen, and preaching the kingdom as he went. It seems that he did not desire publicity—at least not now and here. For it is said,

“He entered into an house, and would have no man know it, but he could not be hid.”

His fame preceded him. The enthusiasm that went with him was like a fire, and caught material everywhere for new flame and fervor. While he was thus hiding himself and resting, there came to him a native woman of mixed blood—“a woman of Canaan,” it is said—that is, a woman of the Canaanites; “a Greek,” again it is said; “a Syrophœnician,” it is said in another place; in other words, a woman who lived in these Phœnician cities, and had a Greek parent (probably a Greek mother), and was of the people of the land on the other side,—came to him. Her errand was one of maternal love. Her daughter was subject to demoniac possessions. Her first appearance was with this outcry:

“Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou son of David!”

This may seem a strange salutation from one of a Gentile nation. It was the Jew that would naturally have addressed to Christ that peculiar title, “Thou Son of David,” which carried in it the intimation of royalty; but doubtless she had seen Christ, and had heard the throng speak of him; and, with the ready wit of an earnest heart, seeking favor, doubtless she thought that that was the title which perhaps would win favor for her. And so she, though a Gentile, and knowing little of who David was, and hearing others speaking of him as of that royal lineage, approached him with this intended compliment:

“Have mercy upon me, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.”

Is there another plea imaginable more potent with God than that of a mother pleading for a daughter? What depths of love! What depths of anguish! And in this case, what anxious days and nights! What hopes and fears! What long waiting! And now, in the height of her distress, comes the man who is filling the land with the fame of his miracles of healing. Before all others, surely, he will address his mercy to this case, when a mother pleads for a daughter, that a demon may be cast out of her.

Strange contrast! He met her outcry without one single word or

look of sympathy. Had he no pity? Did he not care for the sufferer? "He answered her not a word," is the record.

"Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. And he answered her not a word."

Was he so worn out with labor that his susceptibility slept? or did he not care for her because she was a Gentile?

There was evidently a considerable period of seeming indifference during which the Saviour must have denied her passionate appeal; for his disciples, often officious in their care of him, came to him, and besought him, saying,

"Send her away; for she crieth after us."

He replies, enigmatically, that his mission is to his own countrymen.

"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

This seems to be a justifying of himself by appealing to the prejudices of his disciples in favor of their own people, as distinguished from Gentiles. It sounds, too, very strangely, when we consider that he came to die for the world, and that his whole ministry was a continual protest against this very Jewish narrowness, but in favor of universal charity. He seems here to appeal to that very Jewish prejudice, and that very national exclusiveness, which it was one of the chief objects of his mission to overcome.

So then, it is plain to be seen that this was a drama. We all know that it must have been. It was very unlike the popular idea of Christ's habits which now exists, and entirely like his real habits, which were not always merely literal and direct. It is supposed that the Lord Jesus, in his earthly carriage and teaching and intercourse, was as simple, and as transparent, and as level, as a man could be. Because he was pure, and because he was gentle, people think that he was flat. Nothing can be more untrue. No being was ever more mutable, more changeable, with every mood and variety; no being ever opened up more richly and more strangely; no being could be less presumed of. You could presume less in regard to him than in regard to almost any other one, as to what he would say, and what he would do, and how he would demean himself, from what you had seen the day before. Of infinite variety that never staled, nor was in danger of it, Christ's whole career afforded an eminent example. He often hid his nature. He often put forward what seemed to be mere tentative appearances, and drew them back again upon occasion. As a mother plays with her child by a thousand devices, so played he with men's thoughts and feelings and fancies. He played with the meanings of words. He dealt in enigmas, in paradoxes, in dark sayings. He was full of variety.

His teaching and his conduct were not only various, but full of hidings and surprises.

So it was in this instance. It was a notable instance of that genius and tendency of our Saviour. It is plain that he held this woman off that her heart might develop a greater intensity, and that there might spring up before his disciples, as it were, a new problem in moral life. It was not only for the sake of her benefit, but for the sake of its effect upon others, that he took this course. He would have her manifest an intensity of faith of which she would not be capable under ordinary circumstances, and which could not be expected except by some such process as this. Here was escape for the woman's child, and she knew it; and she seemed likely to lose it; and love wrought courage and sublime importunity. For she drew near, and bowed herself to the ground reverentially (for this is the meaning of *worshipped him*), and put her heart's life into the simple words, "Lord, help me!"

Jesus spake—but not yet even sympathetically. He spake as a cold and haughty Jew would. He said, in words that sounded very harsh to her,

"Let the children first be filled; for it is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it unto the dogs."

But he knew as well as you and I know, that mercy to the Gentiles would abstract nothing from mercy to the Jews. Still, this spiritual drama ran on.

A mother's love has in it all courage, all patience, all humility, all faith; and although she was called a Gentile, although she was an outsider, although she was arraigned apparently as inferior to the Jews, although she was likened to the dogs, yet, listen to the sweetness and the beauty of her answer to Christ's declaration that it was not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. She said,

"Truth, Lord; yet the little dogs [for it is that in the original] eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

And now, with sweet spirit, with yielding, without anger, her persistent importunity having made itself fully manifest, he turned to her and said,

"O woman! great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

Have you not seen the whole summer's day go over with clouds in the sky, deep, dark, full of the threat of storms; but as the evening drew near and the winds shifted to the south and to the west, have you not seen streak across the horizon a line of light, which, becoming wider and wider, spread up into the heavens; and ere a half hour have you not seen the whole heavens shine radiant, and the sunbeams bathe the world again, and make hill and valley and all nature rejoice? So.

in the early part of her interview all was sad and dark and repulsive ; but ere long the love of Christ's heart broke forth, and dissipated all that seemed gloomy and forbidding, and all was joy and peace.

A variety of thoughts, suggested for our profit, are to be derived from this narrative :

1. Gifts that come to us from the outside, procured by another, though they may be precious, and may bring to us joy and profit, are after all not to be compared with those gifts which come to us through the arousing of our own inward nature. Had our Saviour, when this woman made petition, at once granted her request, it would have been a great boon to her. Had he healed her child by a word, and passed on, that child would have bloomed in the household, and the mother would never have forgotten the work of mercy which had been wrought for her ; and yet, after all, she herself never would have been as large as she must have been after that interview. By mercies that are wrought out and brought in their entirety to us, and then passed over into our own hands, we having had no agency in the procuring of them—by such mercies we are less blessed than when our friends are kind to us through our own activity in such a way as to raise up and educate and thoroughly strengthen that which is good within us. The soul-power is manhood. He who blesses you in body or in estate is not to be considered less than a benefactor ; but he who blesses your manhood is your best friend. He who has a heart of affection towards you, so that it cultivates affection in you ; he who knows how to instruct you so that you are stimulated to instruct yourself ; he who conveys to you outward blessings such as wealth or position in life in such a way that you are obliged to stamp your thought on them, and in order to that to be developed and educated—he is the greater benefactor. For it is not what we have given to us, but that which the gifts do in us and upon us, that measures their value and their power. Too easy an abundance in this world leads to self-indulgence, which is self-extinction substantially—for self-indulgence always degenerates and works down, and down.

The economy of mercy, the economy of society, and so of nature, the whole development of the divine moral government as manifested in the economy of God in spiritual things, seems to give nothing easily ; to tax and task men for that which they are to receive ; to make blessings shine and attract—but after all to hang them so high that no man shall have them that does not leap for them, that does not work for them, that does not exert himself for them. The things which men task themselves for, and which, after they are obtained, represent exertion, and the exertion of the highest part of our nature—these things rank highest and first.

So, then, the things which men value most, often are the least valuable things about them. The large estate which comes without a thought to the heir is an advantage, and is not likely to be refused; but, after all, the few thousands that have been painfully wrought out by enterprise, and industry, and patience, and faith, and integrity, are worth more to a man than millions on which he has never laid his hand, because they represent education in him. They not only stand for what they are themselves, but they have been a school. They have history. There is a training in them.

When, therefore, we ask mercies of God, we should remember that we are to ask in the line of his own providence and according to the constitution which he has established, both in the natural and in the spiritual world. When we ask that we may sit upon his right hand and upon his left, that we may be advanced in honor, in strength or in moral excellence, let us remember that we ask a gift which may require him to exercise us to the uttermost; to put us through the fire, through the flood, through the severe school of the soldier of campaigns, so that when the gift comes it will seem to us to have come from God.

Now, Christ meant to heal this woman's child all the time; but he dallied with her, he parleyed with her, as if she were a Gentile and not within his diocese; as if there were not enough mercy for both the Jews and the Gentiles. And so he aroused her and stimulated her desires until she became impetuous in her earnestness and faith; and then, the moment when her heart blossomed, he gave her her request. Thus, often, God in this world, in dealing with his children, weighs upon their strength and tasks their patience for a long time, and seems to answer their petitions with strokes, and their importunities with judgments, and their entreaties with pains; and yet in the end he hears their request, and blesses them.

So, remembering this providence and this dispensation, when we ask God for mercies, let us not forget that oftentimes if we take his blessings, we must take them from a fiery hand. The mercy which comes to us may be a mercy which comes with chastisements, that we may be waked up, and that afterwards we may be qualified to receive God's kind and loving ministration.

2. God's dealings with men are largely in this way, as they are revealed to us in providence. We have a distinct revelation of this fact in the twelfth of Hebrews, in that memorable passage in which the apostle says,

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening [if you understand

it, and enter into this school according to its nature and law], God dealeth with you as with sons." "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us; and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of Spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chasten us after their pleasure [that is, according to their best judgment], but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."

Now, all suffering in this world certainly does not tend to the production of spiritual fruit; and yet, there can be no question as to the doctrine of the New Testament, that, in the economy of providence, suffering should work and drive men from their lower plane toward a higher plane, step by step. There can be no question that divine providence is conducted upon this principle, and that the whole retinue of sorrows, and tears, and cares, and burdens, have a mission among men. In one way, it may be that they are from violations of natural law, and that in such a sense they are penalty; but in another way they are all of them working toward a higher education, driving us from a reliance upon our physical life, and making us rely more upon our social relations, and then augmenting our social relations, so that we shall take in the invisible and spiritual, as well as the temporal and visible, and teaching us that there is nothing on earth which can be a satisfaction to the soul that needs infinity, and so bringing us to take in the coming world, and developing us from the lowest state of physical things, up through the social and intellectual nature to the divine and heavenly nature, that we may become partakers of the nature of God. And when we look out upon the world, it is because we misunderstand its economy, that we say, "There is no evidence of divine providence; see how things are mixed together; see how sufferings fall upon all alike; see how there are no guiding principles; see how there is no government that arranges all things according to justice and equity." Yes, there is a government of that kind; but there is a department of that same government which is inflicting trial, and task, and suffering for the sake of higher moral development. And as the Saviour answered the mother when she plead for her child, after he had instructed her higher nature, and developed her spiritual fervor and intensity; so God is still doing. He is answering our prayers in providence, first by strokes and chastisements, and then by turning and saying, "These chastisements are not without a purpose. They are parental benedictions. They are education, to make you sons of God, and to bring you home finally to the heavenly state."

3. There is great power with God in spiritual intensity. Calmness has its place in the experience of the soul; and all the mild virtues have their place, and are full beautiful. It is not necessary that we should overrun them with reproach. It is not necessary that men of intense and fervent natures should undervalue quiet and mild natures;

nor is it necessary that quiet and mild natures should look with contempt upon intense and fervent natures; for both of them are a part of that great constitution of which we have each but little fragments. There can be no question that the philosophy of the New Testament is, that while the later ages of Christian development tend more and more toward peace and calmness in working out our salvation, there is in fervor, there is in intensity, great power—and not merely power of which we gain an analogy in physical things. I mean that God reveals himself as one that is accessible.

There are experiences, then, in every man's life, which are mutable, and which may be changed without any interference with the divine thought in the creation and management of things. God is not limited. He is not shut up in his own laws. He is not a prisoner in the world. He has power over what he has made, and he has the means of interpenetrating the constitution of things which he has established. He can, if he please, add ten thousand things which do not fall out in accordance with ordinary law. And he will do things in response to our importunity. He will do things for his children, on persuasion, provided they be things that are needful; provided the heart be prepared for them; and provided it has that faith which shows that the soul has risen into a condition to be benefited by the things done. And we are not left in doubt that there are mercies for God's people of which they have little conception, and which belong to the realm of intensity in spiritual desire.

Now, let us apply these thoughts.

In the first place, men have an impression that all that is necessary is, that they should watch against temptation, and strive against easily besetting sins, and be vigilant and laborious to overcome that which is wrong. There are few men who do battle against sin in the higher forms of spiritual intensity.

It is said that men are sinful, and will be to the end of life. It is said, in reference to certain constitutional sins, that we must expect that they will show themselves in those who are subject to them to the day of their death. That is all true in the lower sphere; but I believe there is a Holy Ghost that may be shed abroad in the hearts of men by which they may be so transformed that every evil, as it were, may be burnt out of them. It is in the power of education to put men to school in such a way that temptations and faults and sins of the most mighty kinds may be effectually destroyed. A man who, like Saul, is hard, and selfish, and proud, and hateful, and bigoted, and arrogant, and persecuting, may become sweet, and gentle, and magnanimous, and full of sympathy, like Paul. He that has lived for himself, and sacrificed others for himself, may be led to live for others, and to

sacrifice himself for them, dying deaths daily. There is a power by which men may overcome their easily besetting sins, and go into the very fastnesses of their own souls, and drive out all evil tendencies, and place there all the higher elements which God has provided for them, if they will rise to the intensity of the Syrophœnician woman. But it is not a mere wishing, it is not an ordinary solicitation, that will bring this about. It is when heart, and soul, and imagination, and the faith of hope and desire are concentrated, and the soul cries out, "Lord, help me!" that help comes, and is followed by the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

So, in the conflicts to which we are called with care and with trouble in this life, men are often overborne. Though they seek to bear up the best way they can, their trouble accumulates, and their strength seems to decrease. Many and many a one falls down discouraged, and says, "I cannot; I cannot; I am overtaken; I am overburdened." Yes, the natural man is. Men's trials are probably not less than they think them to be, although they may be relatively less, and it is hard for those who are in good health to stand and give consolation to those that are sick. It is hard for men who have great abundance to stand in that abundance and give good advice to those who are girded by all the troubles of poverty. Nevertheless, for that great army of sufferers through poverty, through disappointments, through cares, through troubles, through bereavement, through sicknesses, through conflicts, through all those trials which find their way into the household, and hover around the couch or over the cradle, there is relief. All these causes of suffering are vincible by the spirit of man. There is power in every one to rise up into the communion of God in such a way that there shall descend from the divine Spirit victorious intensity. But this comes only by prayer and fasting.

Thus, when we are laboring for those who are dear to us—for our children, for our pupils, for our friends; when we are seeking to bear them up to a higher level, or to recover them out of the slough; when the sky is overcast; when disappointment has put its cup to our lip; when for days, and months, and, it may be, years of weary waiting, we are almost disposed to give up, to lay down the conflict, there is power of relief even in the most desperate circumstances. There may be a faith, there may be importunity springing up from the soul of man. Christ may, for you, as he did for the Syrophœnician woman, cast the demon out, and say, "Thy faith hath saved thee."

How little do we agonize! How little do we lay ourselves out for those whom we seek to save with all the strength there is in us! How few have ever felt the energy of a soul-burning faith! How few have ever felt toward a fellow-creature, according to the measure

of man, that intensity of influence which God exerts from his great soul upon all those whom he would save! We know not what we can do, and what power there is in us, till we are raised by the Spirit of God to these higher conditions of intensity.

The work of the kingdom of God on earth needs this spiritual energy. We come to this work too often feeling that giving to it our alternative time is enough. We give to God what is left after supplying our lower wants. We give to God our weary hours. We give to God our unoccupied hours. When joy has taken what it needs, and social life has taken what it needs, and business has taken what it needs, then what is left—the barrenness of life, as it were—we give to moral influence and to the cause of God. How few there are who put their concentrated life into the work of God, and bring everything they have—body and soul—to bear on the promotion of God's work in this world! There are some such; and what a mighty power they have! How are they as flames in the world

Mild and gentle working, although it does something, does it in a lower range; does it gradually; does it by slow accretions. The power which brings to pass rapid results; the power that carries up visibly the work of God; the power that promotes morality, that reclaims the intemperate, that inspires energy among the listless, and industry among those who are self-indulgent, that purifies the morals, that lifts the light of the other world upon this world, that brings men out of bondage and darkness into the light and liberty of the sons of God—this power comes from a much higher state of mind, if it be successful, than that which we give to our secular occupations. We know that men buckle themselves to their worldly work with a will, conscious that they will accomplish in proportion as they bring force to bear. But in spiritual life how easy you are! What a light pressure you exert to bring out the most wondrous results! My marvel, when I see people labor in this direction, is, not that there is so little done, but that there is so much done. By the blessing of God much is done; for God gives to the unworthy, and overpays our exertion. And if a hundred men should concentrate the strength of their being for short periods on any charity or cause of benevolence in this world, who can measure what an impetus that charity or cause might receive at their hands! There is no estimating what results may be achieved where spiritual intensity is made to be the condition of victory and of power.

Ah! it is not till we are brought to that point where we feel our need of God, that we know how to say "Lord, help me!" We say it often, and do not say it. We say it because it is the moisture, as it were, the dew, that is upon our night of storm. We say it because

habit has taught us to say it. How few there are, all of whose nature in them joins together and sends forth that victorious sentence, "Lord, help me!" When we do this, then God comes. Then, when we have learned the secret of that sentence, the heavens open. Then the denied gifts are granted. Then the Spirit, before withheld, comes forth, and our joy and peace flow like a river.

Christian brethren, is not this the very sentence which we should write upon the door of the new year—"Lord help me?" Is not this the very petition which we should lay upon our heart, and upon our conscience, and upon all the soul—"Lord, help me"? Is not this that which every parent should see, going into the portals of his dwelling to-day, inscribed there by him—"Lord, help me"? Is not this the very prayer which should overlay our business for the year—"Lord, help me"? Is not this that which, if we stand looking down into the darkness of sickness and trouble, should be to us as Mount Zion—"Lord, help me"? Is not the very word which they who begin a Christian life openly and avowedly to-day, and are to walk through all the phases of Christian experience down to the day of their death, should write upon their shield—"Lord, help me"? And when we rise, by and by, with the great multitude that have washed their raiment in blood, and made it white, then we shall stand in the presence of God, and change the phrase in triumph, saying, "*The Lord hath helped me.*"

And now, Christian brethren, we will, after the blessing is pronounced, draw near to the symbols which represent to our faith that helpful and loving Saviour; and I invite to join with us all those who feel themselves to be sinful, who feel that they need divine help and care, and who are willing to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and his service as their life. I invite them, without reference to any doctrinal distinction or church connection, on this simple and personal ground, that they realize their sinfulness, and feel their need of help, and are willing to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their helper and Saviour. For this is the table of the Lord, and not of this church.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.*

O thou that hast risen from the dead, and art gone up on high, Jesus, our Saviour, thou that art equal to God! thou hast made him known to us. In thee we have found life, and love, and faith, and hope, and pardon; and in thee we desire, from day to day to live, not having on our own righteousness, but that which is of faith by thee. We bless thee for the experience of days gone by. We thank thee for all the knowledge of truth which has been

* Immediately following the reception of members into the Church.

made known to us; for all the hope that has sprung therefrom. We thank thee for that which thou hast promised, and which thou art fulfilling to thy people. We rejoice that thou art with them yet; and that thou art making prayer indeed a power with God; and that parents are receiving their children that were dead spiritually, to life again; and that they that were in their graves are coming forth; and that thou art bringing life and light and glory into many and many a heart. We thank thee for all those that are called, and for all that hear the voice of God calling to them, and who are brought out of darkness into light, and out of winter into summer, and out of every worldliness into joy and heavenly-mindedness.

We thank thee that so many this morning have taken upon themselves the name of the gracious Saviour. May they have his Spirit dwelling perpetually in them. May they have, as an immutable possession, the treasures of hope and faith and love. And we pray, O Lord our God! that in all their trials and temptations and crosses, they may find thee ever present, and thy promises, which are Yea and Amen, abundantly fulfilled to them all, in sickness and in health; in labors in over measure; in heart-sickness from hope deferred. Grant that they may still find that near to thee, everywhere, is grace in which is might and succor for every human need. And we pray that they may never be discouraged. Even though they stumble and fall, may they rise again. Though they wander, may the Shepherd find them, and bring them back to the fold. And we pray, O Lord our God, that they may rejoice in this day, and in this hour.

Bless, we pray thee, this Church, into which they have been taken. May it grow strong not only by numbers, but by courage. May its members be as lights shining into the darkness around about them, that men, seeing their good works, may glorify their Father which is in heaven.

We pray that thou wilt bless all our households. Bless all our children. Bless those that are with us, and those that are scattered far away. On this morning we look abroad and search out over the earth for those that are near and dear to us, and bring them in the arms of our faith, and lay them before thee, and beseech of thee that thy blessing may rest upon them.

We pray that thou wilt be with the sick. Be with all that are broken-hearted. Be with all that sit in the region of the shadow of death. Draw near to the sons of want and distress.

And thou that art the God of the whole earth, we beseech of thee that thou wilt begin thy work of benevolence, and of mercy, and of peace, and of goodness, and love, upon this opening of the year. May all the days of this year, as they successively run out, be days of God's blessing and goodness. And may they prepare us for life or death, but we not being anxious, casting our burdens on the Lord. May we be sustained by the divine promises. May we be upheld by the faith and hope of the Gospel of Christ. And as our days, so may our strength be, also.

And so we pray that thou wilt grant unto us, from year to year, to walk leaning upon thee more and more, and to trust in thy promises, until our time of departure comes. Then may we find our home, and our heaven, and our God, and at last ourselves.

And to thy name shall be the praise; Father, Son and Spirit. *Amen.*

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
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